



Virginia Main Street

More than 25 years of entrepreneurship and investment on
Virginia's Historic Main Streets

How to Apply Workshop Question and Answer

South Boston – May 16, 2011; Marion – May 17, 2011; Richmond – May 18, 2011

The Application

1. Is there a recommended process for filling out the application?

Considering the Main Street Approach is a grassroots effort, the community should be involved with the process as much as possible. It's recommended that a community leader be assigned as the application coordinator, overseeing the application process and its completion; however, volunteers, board members, local government officials and the others can be assigned to particular sections that correlate with certain skills or knowledge base.

2. Is the Affiliate application the same as the designation application?

The Affiliate application is only two pages. Participating with Virginia Main Street as a Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development Commercial District Affiliate only requires that that community representatives at a minimum come to one training a year or call once for technical assistance. Designated communities are held to a higher commitment and thus a more extensive application process is necessary to screen the community's readiness and observance of program guidelines. The Affiliate application can be found at www.dhcd.virginia.gov/mainstreet.

3. Since 70 separate structures are required for eligibility, how do we determine where one building ends and another begins?

The best rule at hand is to count each storefront as a separate building. Note that the requirement of 70 separate structures is a target threshold, based on VMS' past experience of a minimum density to maintain revitalization momentum; proposed districts with less can still be considered for designation.

4. What communities may be competing for the 3-4 designated community spots?

Communities across Virginia have expressed interest in becoming a Virginia Main Street Designated community. The 2011 program expansion is aiming to designate up to four communities, but fewer may be designated depending on the available opportunities for success. Interested communities should not focus on the competition, but instead complete an application that best represents the local economic development goals and commitment to implementing an effective grassroots revitalization effort that correlates with the Main Street Four Point Approach®. Regardless of whether an applicant is chosen for designation or not, VMS will use the application to engage the applicant community in the revitalization process.

5. Is this an annual submission process? Will there be another opportunity to apply within the year?

Program expansion is based on available DHCD resources, so year to year the opportunity may change. Historically Virginia Main Street pursues a program expansion every 2 to 4 years.

6. Is there weight given to a program that already has a paid program manager?

No. A pledge to meet the designation requirements, backed up with plans and supporting documents to make all those things happen soon after designation, is sufficient. It is more important to show an understanding of your community's downtown revitalization needs and a stakeholder commitment to addressing those needs through the Main Street Four Point Approach®.

The Main Street Organization

7. What is an appropriate salary for an executive director?

The executive director's pay should be competitive with local community planners, estimate \$40-45,000/year, depending on your locality. Undervaluing your manager will lead to rapid turnover and may undercut the quality of your applicant pool.

8. What is the optimal size of a Main Street board of directors?

Ideally, the board should have between nine and 13 members that typically, but are not required, to represent the following stakeholder groups: the commercial district's property owners, retailers, professionals, and other business owners; lenders; city and/or county government officials; business association members; heads of neighborhood organizations; recognized community leaders; local civic organizations; preservation and/or historical societies; or, perhaps most importantly, interested citizens. Committee size and makeup varies greatly and may depend on the projects being undertaken, but should also include a variety of stakeholders and at least one board member to help maintain communication.

More important questions than "How many?" is "What skills?" and "How committed?"

9. What if our local government isn't able to give financial support at this time?

Main Street is only successful when it has broad-based public and private support. The program guidelines require "strong support from both the public and private sectors" in order to achieve and maintain designation. The Main Street Approach® is a long-term revitalization strategy and it requires sustained broad-based financial support that includes both the local government as well as contributions from the private sector. Virginia Main Street will assist a newly designated community to build an effective program and garner local government financial support. A resolution is recommended to formally secure local support for three years. Regular reports to the local government may be needed to highlight program accomplishments and demonstrate return on investment (and are a good idea even if not required).

10. What is the expected financial commitment from the locality?

Virginia Main Street does not provide funding to a Main Street organization. An effective organization operating budget receives contributions from the both the private and public sector. In the infancy of a new local Main Street program the local government may provide the primary financial support. As a program matures, contributions from the private sector increase and fundraising efforts become more effective to fill any gaps.

Budget requirements vary by locality, but VMS' experience has shown that Main Street organizations need a minimum of \$85,000/yr to sustain minimal activities. *Effective* programs usually require \$120,000/yr. Interestingly, *effective* programs have less trouble raising the additional funds than minimally active programs have raising the minimum balance. Of course, these amounts can also vary by how effectively the organization leverages volunteer support.

11. Are there any dues?

There are no Virginia Main Street dues required by designated communities. National Trust Main Street Center membership is required yearly; however, the membership is paid for by VMS for the first three years as part of the new community services.

12. Are there any requirements for the local Main Street office?

This will probably be one of the first locally determined questioned. VMS does not mandate an office location. However, downtown is highly recommended for the visibility of the Main Street organization and for easy access to stakeholder.

New Community Services

13. What happens after the three years of service as a newly designated community?

A community is considered a "Newly Designated Main Street Community" for the first one-to-three years after official designation. During this time, Virginia Main Street provides the most intensive services to help the community assess issues facing downtown and increase organizational capacity. VMS works diligently to help the New Community reach National Accreditation (by satisfactorily meeting all of the National Trust Main Street Center's "10 Criteria"). Once a community has reached Accreditation and the up-front, intensive services have been delivered, the community is considered a "Mature Main Street Community." In the "Mature" phase communities will continue to receive on-going services to maintain long-term effectiveness and progress, but in a more limited way. See the VMS Program Guidelines for additional details.

Should a New Community not earn National Accreditation by the end of three years, VMS will, at that time, determine if there is ample public support and will to continue designating the community.